

Family

A Dog Named Krym

People usually place a great deal of value on family, and this is one thing that people and dogs have in common. We, dogs, also consider family to be of the highest value. Like humans, we are social creatures, we need attention, love and family warmth. I am sure that everyone has heard that we are extremely careful in choosing a human family in which we are going to live our entire life.

This happened to me too, about twelve years ago. I am a dog and my name is Krym¹, and this is the story of how I found and lost my family.

I was born in the Ukrainian Crimea in 2011. Having four dog siblings, I was always a very active and curious puppy. When I got a little older, I knew that it would soon be time to choose people for myself. I felt sad because I did not want to part with those I was so accustomed to. However, one day I met Solomiya and Vadym — my new family.

Solomiya and Vadym were on vacation in Crimea when they met me. They fell in love with me at first sight, because I was playful and friendly. I also liked them, because they smelled of kindness and affection. That was the day I knew that these were people for me and that I wanted to be the part of their family.

The road from Crimea to Dnipro, the Ukrainian city from which Solomiya and Vadym came, was long, but calm. I breathed in the sweet smell of lavender fields from the car window and listened to the soft, gentle voices of people who had already become dear to me. Moving day also happened to be the day that I got my name. I realized that my name was Krym, because Solomiya was saying this word all the way home, looking at me and treating me with goodies.

Later, we arrived to a large house with a spacious, bright yard. It was the beginning of my happy new life.

For a whole year, I received the undivided attention of my loved ones until Khrystyna was born to our family. Of course, I was a little jealous, but I understood that I could not be selfish and greedy for

¹ Krym — Ukrainian for Crimea

attention, because Solomiya and Vadym were extremely happy to have a child.

In a few more years, our family went through important changes again. A period of restlessness had come. I felt the tension that I saw in the eyes of my people. I was a little confused, because I began to catch sadness and the sense of loss in their voices exactly when they pronounced the four letters I knew so well.

In a few weeks, I saw Vadym in new, unusual clothes. When he put these clothes on, he calmed down and became happier. Vadym was not at home as often as before, but I knew it was because he was doing something important for all of us.

Time was passing and our family grew. Eventually, Solomiya and Vadym had Roman. They devoted a lot of time to him. Khrystyna and I got used to each other and even became best friends. I understood that I was extremely lucky to feel the warmth and care of my dear people.

Unfortunately, life couldn't be always like this for us. One morning I heard a whistling sound in the sky above me and then saw red and yellow flashes in the distance. The earth shook, and Khrystyna and Roman began to cry. I could smell fear and helplessness and knew that from now on our lives would never be the same.

Vadym went somewhere and did not return for a long time, instead, Vadym's mother moved in with us. The whole family felt better when we were all together.

I was afraid at night, because it was at night that the sky exploded, it was at night that Solomiya cried quietly, it was at night that I did not know whether the morning would come.

Vadym came home only once. I smelled determination and a desire to do all in his power, so that everything would be as it once was. However, I felt that something had changed forever in him. His gaze became firmer but was still full of love for us.

Time dragged on very slowly and we got used to explosions and loud noises around us. I knew that the feeling of home was as important and necessary for my family members as it was for me. It is easier to experience hardship at home, it is easier to cry at home, when you are at home it is easier to understand why you are going through everything that is happening. At home, indeed, you can endure most things. The

only thing you cannot stand at home is intruders who break in and destroy everything you have lived for.

On a night that was unusually warm for autumn, I, accustomed to omnipresent vigilance and loud silence around me, caught a very distinct foreign smell not far from our house. I immediately tried to track it and understand where it was coming from. I ran along the steep road until I felt a cold drizzle falling from the gray starry sky.

On my way back home, I heard a shrill sound of alarm that made everything inside me shrink, but which I had learnt to ignore over time. Just near the yard, I heard a loud whistling in the sky above my head, and a loud explosion a few seconds later. I was thrown several meters away by a hot explosive wave into the branches of one of the trees that Vadym and I planted many years ago in spring.

My ears were ringing. I felt severe pain as I tried to howl and tell my people that I was in trouble. I tried so for a long time, but then I realized that I could hear absolutely nothing: not the wind, not the rustling leaves, not even my own breathing.

I tried to get up and climb onto the path that led to my house. I wriggled out of the branch's embrace. At that time I didn't know that this was the last embrace I would ever feel. Still, I hobbled forward. As I climbed up, for a brief moment I thought that the explosion had disoriented me and I was wrong, thinking that I was near my house.

There was nothing in the place where my house should have stood. I did not hear anything, but I could still smell things, so later I realized that I could still catch the faint smell of my own home.

I ran there as fast as a wounded, concussed twelve-year-old dog could run. It was like I felt absolutely nothing as I ran down the road, all I wanted to do was move forward.

It was dark all around, but I could see the refrigerator, sticking out like a beacon from the pile of planks and bricks, signaling that just moments ago all that rubble had been my house. With a low howl, I approached the remains of my life. I sat down next to them and for the last time felt the warmth of my own home rising up, evaporating into the dark night. I felt like I too was evaporating and disappearing like my family. Tears welled up in my eyes. I did not want to believe that they were gone.

The most frightening thing for me was the realization that I was not alone, that Vadym would have to go through this, that he would feel the same as I was feeling. Why did I run to track the foreign smell? Why didn't I die with my family?

I was afraid of Vadym's eyes. I was afraid that I would no longer see love in them, only loss, pain and rage.

I saw people who fussed around until the early hours of the morning, trying to sort out the ruins that had once been everything to me. I just sat motionless and stared at every mutilated object in that pile of junk. A fragment of Solomiya's shelf, she used to put her cosmetics there, a part of Roman's crib, and even a torn toy of Khrystyna's — my best friend. The house in which we were a family, in which we were happy, was turned inside out.

Of course, I am just a dog and therefore I do not understand everything, but I know for sure that missiles do not explode by themselves. I know they were launched by intruders to ruin what they failed to capture. I know that my house did not disappear, it was destroyed. I know that I did not lose my loved ones, they were killed.

The sun was gradually rising on the horizon, a new day had begun. The day when Vadym and I became orphans because of one Russian missile and thousands of Russian intruders.

I was afraid of Vadym's gaze, but I knew that he would not ask why some people do this to others, he probably knows people better than I do — after all, I am just a dog.